

# The Safe Patient Care Act: *A plan to increase the safety of patients in Michigan hospitals and build and retain a strong nursing workforce.*

**Problem:** There is no law that limits the number of patients a **registered nurse** can be assigned to take care of in the hospital. This results in an alarming and unsafe variety of standards in Michigan hospitals. There is also no law to prevent hospitals from making nurses work unlimited hours without advanced notice (leading to shifts of 14, 16 or even 20 hours, often with little to no rest in between).

Too often, this means your nurse must juggle too many patients or work past the point of exhaustion. Nurses work hard and make every effort to provide quality care and protect patients from harm. But understaffing and overworking nurses is dangerous for patients (increased falls, infections, medication errors and even deaths). Patient harm is the third-leading cause of death in America, and much of that can be prevented by proper RN staffing.

**Solution:** The Michigan Safe Patient Care Act is a 3-part bipartisan package that addresses rampant RN understaffing and excessive forced RN overtime. It will force administrators to make decisions based on patients' needs, rather than misguided cost-cutting in the hospital industry.

(Bill numbers for 2019-2020 are pending.)

A) **Safe RN staffing levels in all hospitals.** Bill overview:

- A committee of at least 50 percent direct-care RNs plans and monitors staffing levels.
- Safe limits on the number of patients per nurse, based on national evidence-based standards, by unit (example: maximum of four patients per RN on a medical-surgical floor).
- Hospital must post information about the law and inform people on how to report violations.
- State runs a toll-free hotline to receive complaints.
- Whistleblower protection for those who report violations.
- Additional time for rural hospitals to comply.
- Fines for non-compliance, to create true accountability.

B) **Limits on forced overtime for RNs.** Bill overview:

- Nurses can't be ordered to work more than 12 hours (a standard shift in many hospitals).
- RNs can still volunteer for overtime, if any is needed, if they know they can provide safe care.
- RNs must have 8 continuous hours off after a shift of 12 hours or more, to rest.
- Nurses are protected from discipline, firing or losing their license if they refuse unplanned extended shifts.
- The limits will be suspended during emergency situations or when a nurse is in the middle of a critical patient procedure.

C) **Hospital transparency.** Bill overview:

- Hospitals must disclose to the public their actual RN-to-patient ratios, which are closely tied to patient outcomes, so consumers can make informed choices and everyone has real data to evaluate. There is currently no law requiring this transparency.